



New Culture Encounters

Subject(s): Cross-Cultural Understanding (*Social Studies*)

Grade Levels: 6–8

Overview

Through a simulation game, students will experience what it is like to confront and deal with a culture highly different from their own. Chamizal National Memorial was built to commemorate a peaceful treaty between two nations with different languages, and cultural backgrounds. The two countries found common ground through diplomacy, goodwill, and cooperation.

Background Information

Science fiction fans will recognize a familiar theme as they participate in this simulation. Many science fiction authors have explored how humans will behave when we meet an alien race for the first time. "New Culture Encounters" brings the question closer to home and asks students to explore the interaction of two cultures—one outgoing and casual, the other more reserved and formal—with different social norms.

Objectives

- Students will gain skills in observing and describing behaviors.
- Students will develop an understanding of how our cultural values influence the way we view other groups.

Materials

- Recorded music
- Note pads and pencils
- Cultural-Norms worksheets for the Mountain People and Valley People Cultures

Procedures

1. Remove all furniture from the center of the classroom. Students will need space to move around. Explain to the class that they will adopt the cultures of two unfamiliar groups. They have been invited to a party at Chamizal National Memorial. Both groups will interact with each other, and then examine their reactions.
2. Divide the participants into three groups. Two groups should be about the same size and should have roughly equal numbers of males and females, if possible. A smaller group of two or three students will act as observers.
3. Ask the observers to watch closely as two different cultural groups—the Mountain People and the Valley People—interact. They may move among the participants, but they may not touch or speak to them. Their observations will help the class view the lesson with a wider perspective during debriefing. Send the Mountain People and Valley People groups to opposite corners of the room. Distribute copies of the Mountain People cultural-norms sheets to one group and the Valley People cultural-norms sheets to the other group. Ask the members of each culture to read these sheets and to discuss their norms among themselves.
4. Visit with the Mountain People and clarify their values. Emphasize the importance of staying in character. Emphasize that the male students should be chaperoned at all times. Remind them of the Mountain

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People's reluctance to initiate contact with people of other cultures.

5. Visit with the Valley People and clarify their values. Emphasize the importance of making several brief contacts rather than a few lengthy ones. Define a contact as eliciting a verbal or nonverbal response from a member of the other culture. Remind them of their friendly, outgoing nature and their eagerness to meet people from other cultures.

The Simulation

1. Announce that the two student groups from imaginary countries have been invited to a party sponsored by Chamizal National Memorial and an international student-exchange organization. The party organizers hope the two groups will get acquainted and learn about each other. When students return to their home schools, they will present culture reports to their classmates. The students are welcome to mingle, dance, and talk.
2. Start the music and let the two cultures interact. The teacher and student observers should walk among the groups looking for behaviors that can be described and discussed during debriefing.
3. After 10 to 12 minutes, call time and end the party. Ask the students to meet once more in opposite corners of the room and to make notes for their culture reports.
4. Give each group about 10 minutes to create a brief report. The Valley People's report will describe Mountain People's behavior and the values that their classmates could expect to encounter if they visited the Mountain People nation. The Mountain People will create a similar description of the Valley People's culture.
5. Ask a representative from the Valley People to present the group's report to the class. Then, after providing the Valley People with a copy of the Mountain People's cultural norms, ask a representative from the Mountain People to read that group's norms sheet. Ask the Valley People to note how their report compared with the Mountain People's cultural-norms sheet.
6. Repeat with a Mountain People representative sharing the group's report on the Valley People

(and provide the Mountain People with the Valley People's norm sheet).

Debriefing

Use questions such as the following to guide discussion of how our own cultural biases influence the way we view other groups. Be sure to ask the small group of observers for their views on the participants' attempts to communicate across cultures and to maintain cultural norms.

- How did you feel about the behavior of your own group's members? Of the other group?
- Did your group's culture report use positive, negative, or neutral terms to describe the other group?
- How well did your group members observe the norms of their assigned culture? During the party, what did you do if a member of your culture did not observe a particular norm?
- What are the real-world advantages of following cultural norms?
- What are some real-world situations that were illustrated during the game?
- Mountain People women were instructed to speak for the Mountain People men. In what real-world situations does one group speak for another?
- How would the game be different for players if the Mountain People men dominated the women?
- What lessons from this activity would you want to keep in mind if you were going to spend time in an unfamiliar culture?

Ask students to also discuss whether they agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- People have difficulty describing the behaviors of other groups in non-judgmental terms.
- People acquire cultural norms fairly quickly.
- Most of the group's norms are maintained through peer pressure.
- Americans tend to feel uncomfortable without eye contact, even though in many parts of the world, eye contact is considered to be rude and impolite.
- The same behavior can be perceived differently depending on your group's

norms. For example, what appears friendly to Valley People seems pushy to Mountain People.

Ask students to list as many examples of cross-cultural experiences as they can. Remind them that not all cross-cultural experiences take place in other countries or between people who speak different languages or come from different racial backgrounds. Attending worship services, for example, with a friend who holds different religious beliefs is a cross-cultural experience. It's possible that going to a new school or having dinner at the home of a friend from another culture also could be a cross-cultural experience. Brainstorm ideas about what students can do to encourage clear communication in such situations.

Extensions

If you have a multicultural class or have international exchange students in your school, help your class develop a project to foster better understanding and communication among the students. Ask students to develop a feature article or regular column for the student newspaper that introduces students from other cultures.

Enduring Understandings

- Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see ourselves, others, and the world.
- Behavior is affected in large part by cultural beliefs and values.
- Culture is like an iceberg. Some aspects are visible; others are beneath the surface. Invisible aspects influence and cause the visible ones.

Essential Questions

- How does my culture shape the way I see myself, others, and the world?
- How do my cultural values and beliefs influence the way I personally behave?
- Why is it important to be aware of the invisible aspects of culture?

Social Studies TEKS Grades 6-8

Citizenship

(13) The student understands that the nature of citizenship varies among societies.

- (A) Describe roles and responsibilities of citizens in selected contemporary societies including the United States.

Culture

(15) The student understands the similarities and differences within and among cultures in different societies.

- (B) Describe some traits that define cultures
(C) Analyze the similarities and differences among selected societies;
(D) identify and explain examples of conflict and cooperation between and among cultures within selected societies.

(16) The student understands that certain institutions are basic to all societies, but characteristics of these institutions may vary from one society to another.

- (B) Compare characteristics of institutions in selected societies.

(17) The student understands relationships that exist among world cultures.

- (A) Explain aspects that link or separate cultures and societies;
(F) Evaluate the consequences of improved communication among cultures.

(19) The student understands the relationship among religion, philosophy, and culture.

- (A) Explain the relationship among religious ideas, philosophical ideas, and culture.

Social Studies Skills

(21) The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology.

- (D) identify different points of view about an issue or topic.

Cultural-Norms Sheet

You are a Mountain Person.

Mountain People Cultural Norms



- Mountain People prefer to interact with members of their own culture.
- Mountain People do not initiate conversation. They speak only when spoken to.
- Mountain People have very formal speech patterns. For example, they always use “sir” and “ma’am.”
- Among Mountain People, women have more status than men. Men are chaperoned by Mountain People women.
- Mountain People men avoid eye contact with women from other cultures.
- Mountain People men do not talk directly to women from other cultures. They respond through their chaperones.
- Mountain People men can talk to men from other cultures. They can maintain eye contact with men from other cultures.

Cultural-Norms Sheet

You are a Valley Person.

Valley People Cultural Norms

- *Valley People are informal and friendly.*
- *Among Valley People, there are no gender roles. Men and women behave the same way.*
- *Valley People are outgoing. They love to make contact with people from other cultures.*
- *Valley People contacts are brief and casual.*
- *Valley People are democratic and call everyone by his or her first name.*
- *Valley People value cross-gender contacts more than same-gender contacts.*

